

Sewickley Valley Historical Society

Signals

XXXVI, Number 4

February 2009

Saturday, February 21, 2009
11:00 a.m.

A Docent-Guided Tour of the Art Collection of the Duquesne Club & the Duquesne Club Charitable Foundation



Pittsburgh's Duquesne Club was founded in 1873 by a group of young businessmen, one of whom was Andrew Carnegie. Henry Clay Frick was among those signing the incorporation papers in 1881. The Club moved into its current Richardsonian Romanesque brownstone building, designed by architects Longfellow, Alden & Harlow, in 1890. Additions were made to the building in 1901-1904 by Rutan & Russell, and in 1930-1932 by Janssen & Cocken.

A landscape by Scalp Level painter George Hetzel, documented in 1896, is the first known work in the Club's art collection. It depicts a forest scene in Pennsylvania and won a gold medal in the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition. The Art Association, predecessor of today's Art and Library Committee, which oversees the collection, bought art for the Club in the early 20th century, and the Duquesne Club Charitable Foundation was established in 2003.

The collection includes works by American and European artists and continues to grow through purchases and donations. Among the artists represented are Charles-François Daubigny, Frederick Remington, William Merritt Post, Elisabeth Shoumatoff, Asher B. Durand and Jules Breton, whose *Harvesters* of 1886 is shown at left. Breton won medals at the Paris Salons in 1859, 1861 and 1867, and exhibited in the 1896, 1897 and 1898 Carnegie Internationals. *When Shadows Hint Death*, Charles M. Russell's 1915 masterpiece, is the best-known work in the Club's collection.

The Duquesne Club tour is free of charge, but we do need to know how many will attend so that the Club can arrange for docents. If you wish to carpool, meet at the Old Sewickley Post Office promptly at 10:00 a.m.; otherwise, meet at the Duquesne Club, 325 6th Avenue, Pittsburgh, at 11:00 a.m.

We have arranged an optional \$20 per person (including tax and tip) lunch in the Terrace Room of the Omni William Penn Hotel after the approximately one-hour tour. Lunch choices are:

Soup of the day or gumbo with a ham and brie sandwich on a croissant, **OR**
The Penn Cobb Salad

If you are staying for lunch, mail your check for \$20, made out to Sewickley Valley Historical Society, to SVHS, 200 Broad Street, Sewickley, PA 15143. **Please indicate your lunch preference.** A phone call to 412-741-5315 will reserve a place for the tour.

Reservations for the tour and for lunch must be received by Friday, February 13, 2009.

The mission of the Sewickley Valley Historical Society
is to promote interest in and to record, collect, preserve, and document the history of the Sewickley Valley.

The Kaiser, Copperheads & a Confrontation

Without stretching the truth too carelessly, I may claim residence on Sewickley Heights for portions of the summer of 1917, although not ensconced in a mansion with surrounding terraced gardens, a built-in heated swimming pool with one-piece silk tank suits provided by the management, gymnasium, pipe organs and tally-ho wagons and forty-two serfs at beck-&-call. I lived in a canvas wall tent with the luxury of a wooden floor, a nearby sparkling spring and outdoor cooking arrangements. Mainly I got along tolerably well.

The United States declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917. Sewickley went overboard to help kill the Kaiser, which was the common slogan, and the local Y.M.C.A. secretary dreamed up the idea of a "War Farm" to be tilled and tended by High School students too young to enlist but fired with ambition to share in the great effort.

I did not investigate whether or not the food shortage was as acute as advertised and joined with the idea because this seemed safe enough; safer to handle a hoe than a gun, certainly. I confess to having joined the Presbyterian Church for precisely the same reason, easier to do it than not to do it. Seems to me I was funneled into the "Inner Sanctum" of the Hi-Y Club on equally flimsy reasoning, but that is how a boy learns, I guess. Of course I am old and wise now and know better, and can say "no" and do as I please except for chaperoning the Sea Scouts and mowing the grass and editing *The Herald* in summer and writing this book and a few other minor details.

Our War Farm on Sewickley Heights in 1917 was a bed of roses and wild blackberries. The farmland available in that area, when you stop to think about it, was no good for farming. The plots allocated to us were the poor-relation variety long since abandoned by wise Estate managers who knew shale and clay when they saw it. These plots were donated freely not only because of their uselessness but due also to the reason, as we were soon to discover, that all of the copperhead snakes for miles around had congregated in these peaceful properties where human feet seldom trod. "War Farm" was the right name for it all, and a good sharp hoe the proper weapon. We fought snakes, not Huns, and this went on 24 hours a day by the clock inasmuch as those copper-hued beggars insisted on nesting beneath the tent

floor, and if you want some royal excitement holler "Snake!" at 3 a.m. on a still, moonless night inside a tent where six teen-agers are rolled up in blankets. You'd be amazed in how many directions six young men can get out of a pegged-down wall tent.

One of these so-called farms was over near Pink House Road, beyond the Allegheny Country Club golf grounds. Our first job was to clear the rubbish from this hillside, and it happened on May 15, 1917. The scene of desolation staggers description: thorns, briars, sumac, elderberry, pokeweed, saw-blade grass and, as though to crown the scene, at the top of the hill stood a barn, all sway-backed and ruined and empty and forlorn with wood shingles, each with a Marcel wave. Our leader was a pink-cheeked young man just out of Penn State Agricultural School, "Pickles" Clarke, and Pickles said the right way to do it was to start at the bottom and work up. We went at it, six of us, and Horatio Alger'd for twenty minutes with what had been a spade before it passed out, a couple of rakes and a hoe. By that time higher mathematics were not required to prove that when we got to the hilltop the field would be under the blanket of next winter's snow. Pickles said to bend our backs to it; we wouldn't win the war standing around jawing about it.

So when everybody got real good and hot and bothered and sweat down their necks I mildly made one of those hole-in-one remarks that single out brain from brawn. I had noticed that a steady west wind was blowing **up** the hill, just right for the purpose. I said simply, "Set fire to it."

Pickles said promptly, "No, none of that," and he was about to quote the text book when Sid McFarland reached over in a clump of cool grass, grabbed the stoneware water jug by its handle and hoisted it up to take a swallow. As I live and breathe, there was a copperhead coiled around the belly of that jug, keeping cool, no doubt. Somebody screamed "For god sake Sid, look out there's a jug around that snake," which took Sid a moment to decipher; but when he focused real close he got the idea, stood there hypnotized a brief eternity, and without moving a body muscle opened his hands and let the jug fall at his feet. The beat-up spade did its first useful work that day when Herb McCracken bashed the copperhead. "You guys nearly scared me to death," said Sid, back to gurgling water

out of the jug. I was going to suggest maybe the snake had been sipping from that jug, but there wasn't time. Somebody had set the field on fire.

With six teen-agers, that is how the cookie crumbles, and now everybody was off with tools to control the blaze, which instantly magnified into a torrid, crackling roar, leaving behind it a glowing Sahara just like I said it would do. The barn was on fire before the blaze got near it. Burning embers, swirled up in the air by the commotion, came down on that shingle roof, which all those years had been awaiting just some such excitement. Thirty minutes later, before our astonished eyes, there was a nice, level sort of black field and a stone foundation filled with glowing timbers hot as perdition.

"We ought to notify the owners," said Pickles, his pink face over ashes and with little Mississippi Rivers running down.

"That ought to be Way's job," stated Jack South flatly, "It was his big fat idea."

So that is how I was privileged to call upon Mrs. Henry R. Rea, who resided in a cute bungalow of ninety-seven rooms with a mile-and-a-half stone wall around the place, and two or three entranceways, and four or five Pierce-Arrows and Packards and a private railroad car and the Russian Balalaika Orchestra whisked over from N. Y. to play for a little New Year's party and the name of the castle "Farm Hill." She owned the Mesabi ore range on Lake Superior, I think; if she didn't it was because she hadn't thought to write a check for it.

I was hopeful of being ambushed or arrested before getting the length of the quarter-mile driveway from the massive gates to the mansion, but save for a Russian wolfhound, which seemed pleased to see me, and a couple of peacocks, which spread their fans, I had no luck at getting stopped. A little cockney butler opened the door and had a silver card tray in his hand.

"You are expected?"

"Well, no...."

"The service entrance, I would suggest."

"Well, this is kind of unusual..."

"May I assist you, young sir?"

"Well, the truth is, we just burned Mrs. Rea's barn down."

“Incredible! Ah, ah—let me ring the fire apparatus—I must locate Mr. Davidson at once! Pardon me!”

“Stand aside, Reginald!” An elderly lady appeared in the doorway.

“Spit it out, now, youngster, where, why, what and when—and first of all do we need help?”

“No, Mrs. Rea, it’s all over; I came to explain and to, well, maybe apologize.” There was no doubt of this being Mrs. Rea.

“Who are you?”

“I’m a War Farm, I mean Fred Way.”

“Who’s your father?”

“Also Fred Way.”

“You’re Mrs. Catherine Way’s nephew, then?”

“That’s right.”

“Where is this barn? I didn’t see any smoke, or smell any smoke.”

“Over on the Sutton farm.”

“Is there a barn over there?”

“Well there was—not to be disrespectful.”

“Come in here, and let’s have the straight of this.”

Now if you want to feel mighty good and uncomfortable on a nice hot May morning, just walk in and make yourself at home with a pair of torn khaki pants on and what’s left of a shirt, and sneakers on, in the lobby of this Waldorf-Astoria with mosaic marble floors and diamond leaded-glass windows looking somberly at you from above, and draperies, and staircases in the plural winding on to balconies and Mrs. Henry Robinson Rea in front of you.

After listening for a while, Mrs. Rea interrupted with a wave of her hand. “Oh, hang the barn; truthfully I didn’t know there was a barn over there, but you’re sure the fire is all out?”

She required Reginald to locate Mr. Alex Davidson, her Estate manager, and Alex drove me back in his old Overland-four and took a look at the wreckage himself.

And that’s the only time ever I visited in the Rea home while it had steam up. In the 1950s when the mansion was in the hands of the wrecker, being torn down to the ground, I was there again snooping around like everybody else. I stood in that marble-floored hallway, denuded of its glory, thinking of President Taft being there, and Theodore Roosevelt’s sister being there, and James Francis Burke, and Ambassador James W. Gerard, and Madame Curie of radium fame being there, and of such royalty as Prince Casimir Lubomirski and his wife Princess Palagia being there...and then I thought about the last remark Mrs. Rea had made to that smoked-ham youngster of 1917. She said then: “I do hope you will come another time when things are less disturbing.”

Truly, truly, how quiet it all was.

(From *Sewickley Valley Stern Marks*, an unpublished manuscript by Frederick Way, Jr., in the Sewickley Valley Historical Society collection)



Farmhill

In Memoriam

Mrs. Harton S. Semple

Sponsors, Patrons, Benefactors

Thanks to the following, who have generously supported the Sewickley Valley Historical Society with gifts in addition to membership dues:

Ulla & Peter Bak; Ellen and Jay Brooks; Chip Carton; Mr. & Mrs. T. Ronald Casper; Mrs. Margaret O. Childs; Mr. & Mrs. George H. Craig; Mr. & Mrs. Richard Elste; Mr. & Mrs. David Genter; Mr. & Mrs. Philip Jones; Mrs. Elsie Y. Lewis; Mary Means; Anne B. Metcalf; Betty & John Moraca; Mrs. David B. Oliver, Jr.; Sally Stevenson Ruffin; Frank W. Simons III; Mr. & Mrs. Donald W. Spalding; Eric & Laura Theis; Richard & Carol S. Thompson; Mr. & Mrs. Sherman White; Mr. & Mrs. Frank Wasco, Jr. (in memory of Marian Hammond Trau and in memory of Florence Craighead Hayes Manning); R. Bruce Williamson, Inc.

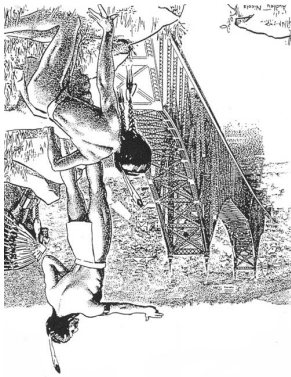
New Members

Betsy Rice Bailey, Greensboro, NC; Don & Helen Berman, Sewickley; James L. Husak, Sewickley; Chris & Susie Keller, Sewickley; Mark & Charlyn Mulkey, Moon Township; Arthur & Wanda Waters, Moon Township



Visit SVHS Headquarters to see this beautiful 1885 oil portrait of William Anderson Coffin by Kenyon Cox. (The November 2008 issue of *Signals* includes short bios of Cox and Coffin and explains their ties to the Sewickley Valley.) The painting was unveiled at a champagne reception on January 30, 2009. James E. Aydelotte, son of the donor, traveled here from Idaho for the event.

Signals is designed and edited by Susan C. Holton. Visit our website, www.sewickleyhistory.org — e-mail us at sewickleyhistory@verizon.net — or call us at 412-741-5315. We're open 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., Tuesday through Friday, or by appointment.



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